

## Mumbai Modern: Colonial Pasts and Postcolonial Predicaments

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Preeti Chopra (2011). *A Joint Enterprise: Indian Elites and the Making of British Bombay*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. xxiv + 293 pp., \$82.50 (paper).

Mariam Dossal (2010). *Theatres of Conflict, City of Hope: Mumbai 1660 to Present Times*. Bombay: Oxford University Press. xvi + 252 pp., \$225 (hardcover).

Kelly Shannon and Janina Gosseye, eds. (2009). *Reclaiming (The Urbanism of) Mumbai*. Amsterdam: Sun Publications, 208 pp., \$56 (paper).

Rajnarayan Chandarkar (2009). *History, Culture and the Indian City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xi + 270 pp., \$92 (hardcover).

Nile Green (2011). *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xvi + 327 pp., \$93 (hardcover).

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In 2002, an eminent Indian historian discerned a distinct “urban turn” in the historiography of South Asia.<sup>1</sup> A growing body of scholarship over the course of the past decade has amply borne out the prescience of that assessment. Recent years have seen the publication of numerous articles and books that attest to the vibrancy of South Asian urban history.

Significantly, these writings have, for the most part, continued to focus on the premier cities of colonial and postcolonial India. **Bombay/Mumbai, in particular, has continued to exert a powerful hold on the scholarly imagination.** Perhaps one reason for this is that the city has come to symbolize both the perils and promise of urban modernity in this part of the world. Once an inconsequential archipelago of seven small islands inhabited by farmers and fishermen, contemporary “Mumbai” is one of the world’s great cities: a sprawling megapolis covering an area of well over four thousand square kilometers and with a population of more than 18 million inhabitants. But the city’s frenetic growth has generated severe environmental problems that threaten its future sustainability.

**Mumbai is also a city of staggering contrasts. On the one hand, a vast majority of its population lives and works in abysmal conditions, densely packed into the city’s teeming “slums,” making a precarious living in the so-called informal sector. On the other hand, its affluent elites pursue lifestyles of calculated extravagance, fit to rival their counterparts in London or New York.** Economic liberalization and “globalization” have only served to accentuate the startling iniquities between its “slumdogs” and its “millionaires.” Moreover, Mumbai’s tryst with modernity has deepened rather than dissolved archaic forms of social identity. Its reputation as a cosmopolitan city has been severely dented by the rise of aggressively parochial forms of politics based on region and religion. Yet many still regard Mumbai as India’s “maximum city”: a place where selves can be made and remade, where the sensory pleasures of the urban are most intensely experienced, and where the possibilities of human creativity and coexistence are most vibrantly on display.

The continuing scholarly interest in Mumbai has also been nourished by the richness and range of the available source materials pertaining to the city. For all its current travails, the Maharashtra State Archives remains an extraordinary repository of records about the city's colonial past. Its rich civic tradition has also bequeathed to the city numerous public libraries and private collections, an invaluable resource for a prospective researcher. Furthermore, while official records for the post-1960 period remain inaccessible for the most part, many nongovernmental organizations and activist groups have set about collecting and collating alternative sources—newspapers, pamphlets, visual material, and oral testimonies—on a range of issues of contemporary concern. All this has meant that Mumbai's history (both colonial and postcolonial) is relatively better documented than many other Indian cities.

The books under review reflect the influence of both these factors on academic scholarship about Mumbai. Contemporary concerns about the crises afflicting the city are prompting scholars to return to the past with new questions. Equally, the availability of a diverse body of source materials is making it possible to approach its colonial and postcolonial history in new ways.

But these books also differ from each other in their intellectual concerns, analytical frameworks and methodological approaches. Some take the long view and cover the entire history of Mumbai's growth from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries. Others concentrate mostly on the nineteenth century, when Bombay first embarked on its career as a modern metropolis. And while some authors view the city's history through a resolutely local lens, yet others situate it within national, transnational, and global contexts.

Nonetheless, two central themes run through these works. One is the ways in which the city and its spaces have been constantly made and remade over the past three centuries. The other is how Bombay's modernity was not only the contingent outcome of the interplay between several processes and agents but also renders problematic many of the axioms enshrined in influential theories of modernization.

The impact of British rule on the urban built environment in South Asia has been a key issue in the historiography of colonial urbanism. But a growing body of work has lately begun to question the view that colonial cities in British India were primarily a product of European design and agency. Preeti Chopra's monograph—*A Joint Enterprise: Indian Elites and the Making of British Bombay*—is a welcome addition to this emergent revisionist perspective within the historiography on colonial urbanism. Her explicit aim—as the study's title suggests—is to restore Indian agency in the making of what many observers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were wont to call *Urbs Prima in Indis*.

Chopra pursues her case in two ways. First, she shows how Indian philanthropists shaped the landscape of colonial Bombay. In the early nineteenth century, wealthy Indians were responsible for building a number of tanks and wells in the town. By the end of the century, their munificence also underpinned the construction of the city's most notable civic buildings. Many of these benefactors were drawn from the miniscule Parsi community—men such as Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Sir Dinshaw Manockjee Petit, and Sir Cowasjee Jehangir—whose contribution to Bombay's public architecture was wholly disproportionate to its numbers.

Second, Chopra also recollects the important role of Indian engineers and craftsmen in constructing many of these public buildings. A fascinating chapter (chapter 3) focuses on the life and times of Khan Bahadur Muncherji Cowasji Murzban (1839–1917), a Parsi engineer employed in the Government of Bombay's Public Works Department (PWD), who played a key role in designing, supervising, and executing a number of important civic buildings in the late Victorian era. At the same time, Murzban also engaged in private philanthropic work in service of his community. He was actively involved in several Parsi charities, designed and built a hospital for Parsi women, and constructed housing colonies for poorer members of the community. Chopra's detailed account shows how “Murzban's abilities as an engineer, his facility in nurturing

mentors, the wide range of official activities he undertook that made him indispensable to the colonial elite, his role as an intermediary between the government and Parsi philanthropists, the prominent association of his family with social reform, and his membership in Masonic lodges all contributed to his success" (p. 87).

Indians like Murzban thus played an important role in the making of what Chopra calls Bombay's "joint public realm." However, this arena was simultaneously marked by cohesion—"the coming together of communities in a common public arena"—and fragmentation—the tendency for communities to see themselves as separate and distinct from others. This contradiction, Chopra argues, was a "characteristic feature of colonial Bombay from the second half of the nineteenth century." The book traces some of the ways in which "both European racial prejudices and a nineteenth-century obsession with counting, sorting, and separating met their counterparts in Indian prejudices of ritual pollution and local interests to create a divided public realm" (p. 119). In particular, Chopra focuses on the hierarchies and divisions that were created within institutions such as hospitals and lunatic asylums. She also shows that these social hierarchies were unstable and changed over time.

In the final chapter, Chopra highlights another interesting feature of the public arena in British Bombay. On the one hand, the city's colonial rulers sought to transform some Indian religious sites into "secular" spaces. On the other hand, Indians invested the "secular colonial public landscape" with religious meanings and symbolism. Thus, she suggests, the meanings associated with Bombay's public architecture was "created by both the colonial regime and the local citizenry" (p. 192).

Chopra's book makes several important points about the role of Indian elites in the making of British Bombay. But aspects of her analytical framework and approach are open to question. For instance, to what extent was the colonial city the outcome of a genuine "partnership" between the colonial and Indian elite? There is an assumption in the book that their participation in this ostensible "joint enterprise" was the outcome of purely voluntary choices made by the city's moneyed Indian elites, and indeed, even the suggestion that their philanthropy reflected an "innate nobility" (p. 69). Arguably, however, the pressure of living up to their status as "public leaders" rendered it virtually impossible for wealthy Indians in Bombay to avoid stumping up cash for colonial civic projects. Moreover, as some of Chopra's own evidence shows, while Indian merchant-princes made a substantial financial contribution to the creation of Bombay's public landscape during the high noon of empire, they often did so on terms set by the colonial government, who remained the "ultimate masters of the city."

Chopra's attempts to recover the meanings of Bombay's Gothic Revival for its Indian inhabitants also tend to be speculative in nature (pp. 60–69). A greater use of non-English primary sources might have enabled her to flesh out this part of the argument. Equally, the tantalizing discussion about the Muslim *dargah* that arose within the precincts of Bombay's Victoria Gardens (pp. 228–29) makes one wish that she had accorded more space in her analysis to the quotidian practices and tactics through which its ordinary Indian residents laid claim to the public landscape of the colonial city.

Contestation and conflict between the colonizers and the colonized is more sharply drawn out in Mariam Dossal's richly illustrated book *Theatres of Conflict, City of Hope: Mumbai 1660 to Present Times*. Like Chopra, Dossal also focuses on the built environment of the colonial city, but her account differs from Chopra's in two important ways. First, her narrative spans a longer period, covering as it does Bombay's history from the mid-seventeenth to the late twentieth centuries. Second, her book treats the creation of the city's public architecture as part of a broader account of the "politics of land use."

The central aim of the book is to show how the patterns of land use have dramatically transformed Bombay/Mumbai from "an agrarian settlement of little significance to a world city where

expensive private property dominates every aspect of life" (p. xix). To this end, Dossal focuses on the transition from the "feudal" tenures that existed under Portuguese rule to the "capitalist relations" and land market that developed under British auspices. This was a long-drawn-out process that entailed the replacement of a range of customary rights to the land with "a uniform system of land tenure based on private property." In turn, the drive to impose uniformity entailed a progressively greater need on the part of the colonial state for accurate knowledge and information about the rights to land held by various individuals and communities and the concomitant attempt to claw these back. Crucially, Dossal shows how the colonial authorities in nineteenth-century Bombay used cadastral surveys (in 1811–1827 and 1865–1872) as a way of exerting their own control over land.

At the same time, Dossal also highlights the limitations of the state in transforming Bombay's land market. At one level, she demonstrates how colonial authorities, far from acting in a decisive manner, were often hesitant and clumsy in their dealing with local land-owners. At another level, she draws out the ways in which state attempts to take over land were contested by local residents throughout Bombay's history. In particular, she provides a wealth of evidence drawn from nineteenth-century colonial records—from the case of the Shamsett brothers in the early 1800s to that of Navibai Ludha in the 1870s—of resistance to colonial policies of land acquisition and control.

But Dossal's survey is not without its drawbacks. While it seeks to chart the entire history of urban development in Bombay, the most substantive sections are about the nineteenth century, the focus of much of Dossal's own research over the years. Indeed, the entire post-Independence period is covered in a brief final chapter that constitutes no more than 5 percent of the entire book. Moreover, the study tends to lose its coherence in dealing with the decades after 1930; the sharply focused analysis of the evolving land market in the city gives way to a diffuse and descriptive account of various issues pertaining to contemporary urban development, from the housing question to the environmental consequences of unregulated urbanization.

The problems besetting the contemporary megapolis are addressed in greater depth in Kelly Shannon and Janina Gosseye's *Reclaiming (The Urbanism of) Mumbai*. The contributors to this collection of essays—mostly architects and urban designers—"formulate crucial concerns and criticisms, open new visions, identify potentials, [and] plead for a new balance and for another form of governance" (p. 193). Specifically, the issues they highlight include the challenge of coping simultaneously with the consequences of economic liberalization and globalization on the one hand, and deindustrialization and decentralization, on the other; the unruly and unregulated way in which the city is growing and the postcolonial state's "fragmented, piecemeal and ad-hoc" approach to urban governance and planning; the monstrous iniquities and tacit exclusions that have marked the rapid transformation of its built environment, especially with regard to the old mill districts, where factories and lands formerly occupied by the working classes have given way to glitzy malls and residential buildings for the rich; and most importantly, the looming ecological crisis that threatens the city as a consequence of reckless reclamation projects and the steady "depletion and degradation" of its natural environment.

Some authors look to the past, both to understand the historical origins of many of Mumbai's present-day problems and as a rich resource in developing an urban vision for the future that is organically linked to longstanding cultural sites and practices within the city. For instance, Matthew Neville (chapter 8) explores the interesting history of Banganga Tank, one of Mumbai's "last surviving water tanks," which is "a shared resource, shared space and relic of the past." His account shows how Banganga is "unique in its ability to structure dense, fine-grained, human-scale fabric, to secure open, public space, to provide access to water and simply prevail against development pressures—and remain a *living* and lasting traditional piece of a rapidly changing city" (p. 112). Similarly, Janina Gosseye's essay (chapter 9) seeks to uncover the "secret magic"

of Mumbai's famous *maidans*. Despite being currently "threatened by the demands of modern urbanization," she suggests, these *maidans* "are amongst a handful of places that offer real hope of individual freedom and collective engagement within the Island City" (p. 129). Not only are *maidans* "rooted in history" as "contested territories" that recall the past struggles of Indians to assert their rights in the city, "their spatial arrangement and undetermined character should be appraised as an example of how 'open spaces' in Mumbai might be designed" (p. 130).

Yet other essays express a desire for alternative ways of describing and designing postcolonial and postindustrial cities like Mumbai. Thus, Rohan Shivkumar (chapter 12) calls for "new words and new metaphors that can decode the forces working within the contemporary city, that can reveal the colonizations, the territorial claims and patterns, the mutations and hybridizations of form and space, and the new forms of order that exist in the contested spaces of the city" (p. 157). Julia Tiranishti and Elisabeta Gjoklaj (chapter 13), on the other hand, reflect on the possibilities of creatively remaking Mumbai's postindustrial landscapes by examining redevelopment initiatives in Zhongshan (China), Lowell (Massachusetts, USA), and Lyon (France).

This is a well-intentioned and well-produced volume, but one is also left with misgivings about its assumptions and approach. To begin with, as Andre Loeckx (chapter 14) perceptively notes in his commentary, in focusing primarily on the environmental aspects of urban development and planning some of the authors tend to gloss over "the multiple and contradictory nature of a metropolis such as Mumbai" (p. 179). More importantly, with a few exceptions—notably, the essays by Neera Adarkar (chapter 4), Padma Desai (chapter 6), and Vidyadhar Pathak (chapter 7)—the essays in the book eschew a systematic analysis of the politics of urban development. Instead, many of the contributors adopt a prescriptive approach to the problems that they diagnose and describe. But if at all Mumbai's history teaches us anything, it is that the designs of the urban planner have constantly been subverted by the play of politics.

It was precisely his robust emphasis on the centrality of power relations and politics in the making of modern Bombay that was a distinctive feature of the late Rajnarayan Chandavarkar's writings. The better part of Chandavarkar's career was devoted to the study of the city's industrial past and, in particular, the social formation and political culture of its working classes. Notably, in two major publications in the 1990s<sup>2</sup> he showed how Bombay's history was shaped by the interaction between capital, labor, and the colonial state. In these works, Chandavarkar also challenged influential approaches to the study of working-class politics in colonial India. On the one hand, he rejected teleological readings of class and "class consciousness," arguing that these were best understood as the historically contingent outcome of specific political contexts. On the other hand, he was also briskly dismissive of attempts to invoke "culture"—especially, "pre-capitalist" traditions, identities, and social relations—in accounting for the supposed "exceptionalism" of the Indian working classes. Instead, his writings emphasized the ways in which it was the workings of industrial capitalism in colonial Bombay that accentuated the salience of ascriptive social ties among the city's workers.

Chandavarkar's untimely death in 2006 deprived South Asian studies of one of its most important and incisive voices. *History, Culture and the Indian City* is a collection of his essays—put together by Jennifer Davis, David Washbrook, and Gordon Johnson—which, with one noteworthy exception, were "selected from a very substantial corpus of unpublished, semi-published and unfinished papers" (p. xi). Not surprisingly, then, the individual pieces differ in their overall quality, ranging from the finely chiselled to the roughly hewn. But, cumulatively, they address Chandavarkar's principal research interests: Indian politics and society, the historiography of modern India, and above all, the social history of Bombay.

Some of the essays on Bombay in this collection reprise Chandavarkar's well-known analysis of, and arguments about, the city's experience of industrialization and the social organization of its working classes. In particular, they restate his trenchant critique of functionalist and Marxist

accounts of industrialization as well as his view that Bombay's history as a modern metropolis cannot be understood without taking into account the agency of its working classes. Chandavarkar also reminds us that Bombay's modernity was "shaped by its interplay with a widening rural hinterland" and "not simply by the 'modernizing' forces of the West" (p. 15).

Other essays in the volume bring into sharper focus aspects of the city's urbanization that Chandavarkar had treated cursorily in previously published writings. Thus, an essay on the city's drains and sewers explores "the process by which an infrastructure was put together for what was to become one of the world's largest metropolitan centres in the twentieth century" (p. 31). This concludes that the "formulation of a sustained and effective policy was complicated by the delicate balances which the colonial state and its local manifestations sought to maintain between conflicting needs: the need to fight epidemics, the need to attract labour, the need to minimize political discontent, the need to respect the old maxim of political control, and light taxation" (p. 58).

Although this analysis of sewers was intended as an exercise in "urban history," Chandavarkar characteristically resisted the temptations of subdisciplinary specialism. Another essay—on the historiography of urban South Asia—makes clear his reservations about the "underlying purpose and problematic" of urban history. Its difficulties as a field of inquiry, he suggests, arise both from urban history's "lack of a firm conceptual base and an effective theoretical discourse" as well as "the weaknesses of the urban as a social category." At one level, "cities cannot be understood as generic social entities, autonomous of the wider social, economic and political structures in which they are embedded." At another level, "the fundamental dichotomy between the urban and the rural has proved no easier to sustain" (p. 208).

Chandavarkar was equally scathing about the "heuristic categories"—for instance, the "ceremonial city," the "Islamic town" or the "colonial city"—deployed by scholars of South Asian urbanism. Typologies based on notions of "Hindu, Muslim and colonial cities," as he was quick to point out, "have arisen from an assumption of their exceptional character, set against some normative pattern of urban development and urban life" (p. 218).

Easily the best essay in this volume was originally published in 2004 as the introduction to a collection of oral testimonies of Bombay's *Girangaon* (literally "mill village") compiled by Neera Adarkar and Meena Menon. Chandavarkar's essay—"From neighbourhood to nation: the rise and fall of the Left in Bombay's Girangaon in the twentieth century"—offers a superb historical analysis of the changing fortunes of the city's mill districts and its working classes by locating these developments within the larger context of the decline of the cotton-textile industry, the fading fortunes of the once-dominant Communist parties and the rise to power of the right-wing Shiv Sena. The essay is notable for the greater analytical salience that Chandavarkar now came to accord to "culture" in the formation of working-class identities and his magisterial account of the entirety of Bombay's twentieth-century history.<sup>3</sup>

Chandavarkar's evocative narrative of Girangaon's history in this essay is marked by a palpable sense of loss. But he also came to regard the manner in which the mill districts were ripped apart as a reflection of Bombay's slow transformation into Mumbai. In another essay titled "Bombay's perennial modernities," Chandavarkar portrays a disintegrating urban fabric and laments the disappearance of the city's once cosmopolitan ethos, of the liberal and secular aspirations of its nationalist elite, of the spaces and places that the working classes had fashioned through their struggles, and of notions of equity and justice in the conduct of the rich towards the poor. Above all, the essay expresses a deep concern that Bombay's modernity "was being dissipated into archaic divisions" (p. 29).

Nile Green's *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915*, suggests, however, that the "archaic" has been constitutive of Bombay's urban modernity from the very outset. In this book, Green sets out to show how Bombay became "a primary city of Islam" (p. 3) with well over 150,000 Muslims living in the city by the beginning of the twentieth

century. Drawn as they were from all over the Indian Ocean, the Muslims of Bombay were notable for their astonishingly varied regional and ethnic origins. As one early nineteenth-century Persian account observed, the city was home to “Arabs and Turks, Iranis and Turanis, Sindis and Hindis, Kabulis and Qandaharis, Punjabis and Lahoris, Kashmiris and Multanis, Madrasis and Malabaris, Gujaratis and Dakanis, Baghdadis and Basrawis, Muscatis and Konkanis” (p. 4). Its Muslims also belonged to social classes “as diverse as the merchants and political exiles of Iran and the rural poor of the surrounding country in the Konkan and Gujarat” (p. 5).

Green’s book focuses on the ways in which the city’s Muslims experienced and responded to Bombay’s industrial modernity. In particular, he argues that they resorted “to their own cultural resources to make sense of their brave new world of cotton mills and dockyards” (p. 2). Indeed, he contends that with “its saints and miracles, its theologies and pamphlets, its festivals and schools, Bombay Islam was no less a response to industrial change than the leftist ideologies and working-men’s clubs that form the familiar stock-in-trade of the labour historian” (p. 2). In important ways, then, Green’s analytical perspective differs radically from historians like Chandavarkar in whose writings “the social and intellectual forces of modernity have been read through secular or national trajectories” (p. 3).

But Green is no neo-Orientalist in his emphasis on the role of religion in Bombay’s experience of colonial modernity. On the contrary, he deploys a supple and dynamic interpretative model of the “religious economy” in exploring the interplay between empire, industry, and Islam. According to Green, “religious activities and interactions are *like* commercial activities and interactions in their capacity to be rendered intelligible through the interpretive model of the economy.” Moreover, religious economies, like their commercial analogues, “constitute a market of potential ‘customers’ or ‘consumers,’ a set of ‘firms’ competing to serve that market, and the religious ‘products’ and ‘services’ produced or otherwise made available by those firms” (p. 9).

From the mid-nineteenth century, Green argues, the interaction of several factors—colonial policies of noninterference in the religious affairs of the local population, the activities of Christian missionary societies, the presence of “a diverse body of religious producers and consumers,” the spread of new industrial technologies of communication and reproduction, and the rise of a new “individualism”—produced “a new kind of pluralistic, competitive and ‘liberal’ religious economy” in Bombay (pp. 11–14). This was especially the case with the city’s Muslims, among whom there emerged a highly competitive religious economy comprising myriad producers and consumers of “religious products and services” (p. 16). Thus, “the conditions of industrial modernity did not necessarily lead to fewer ‘Reformist,’ ‘uniform’ or ‘globalized’ religious forms any more than they favoured processes of rationalization and disenchantment” (p. 22).

Green charts two key processes that were central to the making of Bombay Islam. At one level, he highlights the diverse ways in which Muslims in the city responded both to its plural religious economy and the pressures of urban modernity. One response—largely the preserve of an emergent modernist Muslim bourgeoisie in the city—was to fashion a “reformist” and “disenchanted” Islam that critiqued traditional practices and sought to purge the religion of its syncretic elements. Another response, more conservative in outlook, sought to propagate the message of a spartan and purified Islam through “networks of *madrasas*” (p. 40). But alongside these reformist projects, there also flourished in Bombay a “Customary Islam,” based on shrines, cults, and miracle workers. As a result, “the growth of Bombay was not only coeval with train stations and factories but also with sites of the anti-scientific power associated with relics, rituals and holy men” (p. 53). “For many of its Muslims, especially among the labouring classes,” Green asserts, “Bombay’s industrialization was inseparable from the enchantment of its mills, stations and dockyards by the providers of religious services that ranged from supernatural medicines to social support networks and licit entertainments” (p. 236).

At another level, Green also examines the transnational and continental networks into which Bombay's religious economy was plugged. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the city came to dominate the large market for Islamic firms, entrepreneurs, and products "that stretched between Durban, Tehran and Hyderabad" (p. 8). Its religious firms and religious entrepreneurs were quick to take advantage of the new technologies of communication and the new markets for religious activity made possible by industrial modernity. Here again, the forms of Customary Islam exported from colonial Bombay showed an impressive resilience. "The manner in which Bombay was able to reproduce custom in response to the demands of new urban consumers (particularly merchant and labour groups) and the opportunities of new production and distribution mechanisms," Green suggests, "helps explain why, despite the transformation of modernity, the Customary Islam of saints, miracles and shrines continues to flourish throughout South Asia and the Indian Ocean to this day, even if the place of Bombay within it has long diminished" (p. 240).

Green's book is an original and important contribution to the historiography on Bombay. But his analysis and arguments are problematic in some respects. For one, while Green is sharply attuned to the internal diversity among Bombay's religious entrepreneurs and firms, his account tends, at times, to treat as an undifferentiated mass the Muslim labouring classes who were their principal clients and consumers. However, internal divisions of status and skill among the city's Muslim workers may well have had crucial bearings on the ways in which they responded to particular "reformist" and "customary" religious endeavors and products. Furthermore, although Green asserts that his study is intended as a contribution to the "longstanding debates in labour history, especially the place of 'custom' in labour culture," **he does not probe deeply the working lives or political culture of Bombay's heterogeneous Muslim subaltern classes.** This neglect of the material and political context substantially weakens the book's claim that it "explains the absence of an egalitarian ethic among Indian workers that once so perplexed the heirs of E.P. Thompson" (p. 238). Equally questionable is Green's contention that the "stake of the Indian workers in an economy of religious enchantment helps explain the continuity of the 'traditional' hierarchical social relations that the rise of industrial labour was once seen as challenging" (ibid.). Arguably, their adherence to customary practices and ideas did not necessarily preclude Muslim workers in the rapidly urbanizing milieu of Bombay from engaging in egalitarian forms of political action.

Taken together, the books reviewed above highlight different aspects of Bombay's richly layered past and the ways in which it continues to impinge on its fraught present. They show how the contingent interplay between diverse processes and the complex interaction of various social groups and individuals served to define and shape its distinctive modernity. These works also underscore how contestation and conflict was integral to the making of urban spaces and sites in colonial Bombay. And, more troublingly, they suggest that postcolonial democracy has intensified, rather than resolved, the challenges confronting its current leaders and citizens alike.

## Notes

1. Gyan Prakash, "The Urban Turn," in *Sarai Reader 02: Cities of Everyday Life*, ed. Ravi Vasudevan, Ravi Sundaram, Jeebesh Bagchi, et al. (Delhi: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2002), 3.
2. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900-1940* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
3. On this point, see also Douglas E. Haynes, 'Rethinking the Twentieth-Century History of Mumbai', (*Modern Asian Studies*, forthcoming). I am grateful to Professor Haynes for showing me a draft of his unpublished essay.

## Author Biography

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